

CREATING ORIGINAL ARTWORK



Objective

Students will create original silhouettes of themselves and/or classmates.

Standards

Visual Arts 2.2.a, 3.1.b, 3.1.c (grades 3 – 5)

Grade level

3 - 5

Length of lesson

45 – 60 minutes

Materials from trunk

- Sample silhouettes created by Lauren Muney
- Captain Edward Trippe
- General Horatio Gates
- Charles Pinkney
- Biographical sketch cards on three silhouette individuals

Materials from classroom

- Light source (strong flashlight, overhead or slide projector, flood light)
- White chalk/crayons for tracing
- White construction paper
- Black construction paper
- Tape
- Scissors

Overview

This lesson applies art-making techniques as a way to connect with history, but also build skills, exploring light, shape and shadow. Through discussion and engagement in silhouette making, students gain an understanding of an art form, but also a deeper connection to personal experiences and everyday life before, during and immediately following the War of 1812.

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Teacher Background

A **silhouette** is a picture of a person (or thing) that shows only their outline, usually filled with dark color, against a light background (or vice versa). Generally speaking there were two kinds of silhouettes: “cut and paste” (black silhouettes on white or cream paper) and “hollow cut” (a silhouette cut out of white or cream paper, the center removed and then black paper was mounted on the back. A professional silhouette maker can quickly cut an outline freehand.

Silhouettes were a popular form of artwork in the 18th and 19th centuries. For many, formal paintings were prohibitively expensive, whereas silhouettes were a relatively affordable way to capture in time the image of a loved one. In this age before photography, people from various walks of life could commission silhouettes. Depicted hanging on the hearth in the early 19th-century paintings of John L. Krimmel, silhouettes were at the height of popularity during the time of the War of 1812. At the end of the 18th century, something called the “science of physiognomy” was extremely popular. Physiognomy claimed that one could tell a lot about a person (their qualities, strengths, values, etc.) by interpreting their facial features and profile. A big supporter of this movement was Johann Kaspar Lavater, who used silhouettes to substantiate this theory. Though the theory of physiognomy has been dismissed, silhouettes are still popular today.

In preparation for this activity, you’ll need to set up a “studio” space in the classroom. The “studio” should include a chair for a student (model) to sit on in profile, a strong light source positioned so that it captures the model’s profile on a clear wall, black construction paper to tape onto the wall to capture the model’s profile and white chalk or crayons.

Procedure

1. Explain to students that they will be making their own silhouettes. Show them samples of the silhouettes from the trunk and point out the silhouettes featured in the background of several of the John Krimmel paintings included in the trunk. At the time of the War of 1812, these portraits were at their height of popularity. As a whole class, discuss the following questions: What is a silhouette? Has anyone ever seen one before? How are they made? Historically, who might have had them and for what purpose?
2. In small groups or pairs, students use the studio space and create their silhouettes. Review the steps outlined below. You may want to demonstrate with one student first so that the steps are clearly modeled. Remember, you will need to help oversee the work being done.
3. Here are steps for making a silhouette. Taking turns, one student should be the model and one should be the silhouette maker.
 - The “model” is seated in profile and must stay perfectly still. The light source should be positioned so that when the model is seated, the shadow of his or her profile is clearly projected on the wall. Adjustments may need to be made to distances between the lamp and model until the shadow looks clear and appropriately sized.
 - The silhouette maker should tape black construction paper on the wall so that the shadow of the model’s profile is captured.

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- Using white chalk or a white crayon, the silhouette maker traces the outline of the model's profile (s/he will need to be sure not to interfere with the light, not to rush and that the model stays perfectly still).
 - After the tracing is complete, cut the silhouette out and glue it to a white piece of construction paper.
4. After students have traded with partners and each had a turn to be both a model and a silhouette maker, come back together as a whole class. What was the most challenging part of the process? Share silhouettes. Do the completed artworks resemble the students?

Extensions

- Frame the classroom silhouettes and hang them for display, inviting family and friends to come and guess whose silhouette is whose. This could be part of the object exhibition in the Create an Exhibition lesson.

Modifications

- For more exact silhouette profiles, you can take digital photos of the model's profile against a large white sheet or clear white wall, print these on white paper, place the white paper on top of the black paper (cutting through both sheets of paper) and then glue the black silhouette to white construction paper.

Related Resources

Different websites for making silhouettes

<http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/do/silhouette.html>

<http://artcafe.net/?p=52>

The website of silhouette artist Lauren Muney

<http://silhouettesbyhand.wordpress.com>

Lukasik, Christopher.

2010 *Discerning Characters: The Culture of Appearance in Early America*.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

An academic book on the subject of physiognomy

Pearl, Sharrona.

2012 *About Faces; Physiognomy in Nineteenth Century Britain*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

An academic book addressing the impact of physiognomy in 19th century daily life.

Rutherford, Emma.

2009 *Silhouette: the Art of the Shadow*.

New York: Rizzoli Press.